

The Card Catalog of Myself

001

**Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, -The.**

*Lying in a wooden cradle: tucked under a faded quilt, 1999.*

Your first book, bits and pieces read to you by your father every night, leaning over you in his work boots and safety glasses. Your mother thought he was nuts—there was no way a newborn could possibly remember words whispered to them between worn cradle bars.

1. She was right—but you remembered other things. 2. The scratch of his whiskers and the rusty sound of his voice—3.

That was the beginning.

009

**Bible, Holy.**

*The second pew on the Blessed Mother's side, 2001.*

The first book you truly remember, read to you in hard church pews that made you fidget and trapped in the towering tomes on your parents' bedside table. You hated it, sometimes—why listen to stories inside a stuffy building full of incense when there are mud pies to make and rock piles to climb?

1. It wasn't until later that you realized the stories were true.

035

**Chrysanthemum.**

*A hard park bench: slow salted tears, 2003.*

When you ran to your mother crying because a group of girls made fun of your name, she did nothing but wipe your tears and read you a story of a mouse with a pretty smile who learned to love her imperfections.

1. She did the voices until you began to laugh again—2. And that was when you discovered books are more than just stories.

046

**Dinosaurs, Encyclopedia of.**

*Snuggled in a polka-dot quilt, 2004.*

During a foray into your father's closet, you discovered an encyclopedia of dinosaurs tucked behind a faded pair of slacks. Fascinated; you toppled the volume from the shelf, drug it by its dust jacket to your mother, and promptly demanded she *read*.

1. She hated every bit of it—2. But the tradition grew—3. Your mother, perched on the edge of your mattress, voice heavy with sleep, you curled up next to her side—4. Watching her finger trail across the page.

096

**Eensy-Weensy Spider, The.**

*A squeaky twin bed: Saturday morning, 2004.*

A favorite of yours often shoved into your parents' laps at bedtime. It wasn't long before you mouthed the words with them, your crooked finger replacing theirs.

1. As the mess of scribbles and squiggles slowly arranged into comprehensible thought—2. You became unstoppable.

141

**Fancy Nancy.**

*Cross-legged on a rug, 2005.*

The first book you read to your parents, their eyes trained on you and not the page.

1. You stumbled over words a few times—2. Hard ones, like *fuchsia* and *sprinkles*—3. —But they applauded all the same.

230

**Grumpy Goat.**

*The carpet square farthest from the door, 2005.*

The story your smiling kindergarten teacher read on the first day of school. You were shy, of course, nervously clinging to your mother's hand until a small blond

girl at the edge of the reading circle smiled at you, shifting slightly to make space. You crept over, sat down, and refused look at her until the teacher turned the page.

1. You would stay beside her and whisper the bits of text that you understood—2.—As if the words themselves were secrets.

306

**High Tide in Hawaii, Magic Tree House Series.**

*Solitary crosswalks: the cold corner of the library, 2007.*

After the little blond girl moved away, you used to go to the library during recess, finding more comfort in the bindings of books than the bounce of balls. You devoured the Magic Tree House series within a month. Then the Boxcar Children. Then Stilton.

1. And it still wasn't enough.

461

**Isiah 25:1-6.**

*An itchy dress: a church stinking of sadness and sweat, 2008.*

Delivered in a quiet, shaking voice to a weeping crowd—*on this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples; he will destroy death forever.*

1. You would read it three more times before the year was through—2. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust—3. Why did God take them from us?

503

**Jabberwocky (Through the Looking Glass).**

*The unsteady desk third from the back, 2008.*

You would cry in the back of class so your teacher wouldn't see. She saw, and gave you *Alice in Wonderland* to occupy your mind. *Through the Looking Glass* appeared a day later.

1. It was the poem that made you laugh again—

576

**Kill a Mockingbird, To.***Tucked away behind a frozen jungle gym, 2009.*

A book many people said you were too young for. Soon after you finished reading it, your classmates goaded you into making fun of a black girl's hair.

1. You did not yet understand.

663

**Little Women.***Feet tapping furiously against a straight-backed chair, 2010.*

The first book you remember hating.

1. Honestly, Laurie was the worst—2. Who marries their ex-lover's sister? 3—No one, that's who.

707

**Magi, The Gift of the.***A cold Christmas day: artificial pine brushing the tops of your hands, 2011.*

A brush with O. Henry. You fell in love with the style of a master.

1. The quick-witted humor—2. The unexpected ending—3. The irony of a girl with so much to say and no way to say it—

783

**Nineteen Eighty-Four.***An empty girls' bathroom, 2012.*

Books were crimes in middle school, so you read in hidden corners and darkened crannies, snapping it shut as soon as you heard friend's footsteps, yanked back into a world of blind adherence.

1. As you were told what to do and where to go and what to think—2. You wondered if Big Brother had escaped the story.

812

**Odyssey, The.***Somewhere on a bus, probably, 2012—.*

An unfinished journey. A book left somewhere in transit from a volleyball game to volleyball game, abruptly trapped in the suspension of forgetfulness.

1. Perhaps someone picked it up, somehow—2. And read it from the bookmarked page—3. So that you finished the story together.

871 **Purgatorio (The Divine Comedy).**

*A twisting of dyed hair: Breaking Benjamin blaring in the background, 2013.*

Wedged between stories, just like you. The forgotten bit of transition between Heaven and Hell, growth and stagnancy, what was and what was to come.

1. You read it through smudged black eyeliner and rumpled band tees—2. Purgatorio was your favorite, and you didn't know why—

871 **Quixote, Don.**

*Lying on a beach: a road trip home, 2013.*

You smiled every time Cervantes dared to break the fourth wall, defying an age of order. Risk often precedes greatness.

1. Like writing essays in card catalog formats—2. –Interesting, don't you think?

898 **Romeo and Juliet.**

*A clustered freshman reading circle, 2014.*

An embarrassment, at first. You were Juliet, forced to speak sweet nothings to a boy you liked in front of a class who knew it. They laughed (and you blushed) every time the two of you shared a scene.

1. You laughed with them, after a while—2. –Well aware of how ridiculous you were.

956 **Spring is like a perhaps hand—.**

*The back of a textbook: caught between Hughes and Dickinson, 2015.*

Something that you had never read before. Something that broke the rules. Wild.  
Unpredictable. Erroneous. Perfect.

1. You promptly read everything Cummings wrote—2. —And  
learned to be content with your own oddities.

1001 **That Good Night, Do Not Go Gentle Into.**

*The inside of a locker: taped, 2016.*

A mantra that began to echo inside of your head. A strong posture, a cutting  
voice. You discovered the backbone you had lacked before.

1. With bits of you running together like broken stanzas—2.  
You became you own story.

1097 **Ulysses.**

*Rocking on a front porch swing: at peace, 2016.*

You vaguely remembered the copy of *The Odyssey* you had forgotten on a bus  
seat so long ago.

1. Perhaps you would finish your journey after all—

1176 **View, A Room With A.**

*Ironically, in a classroom with no windows, 2017.*

A book that ended in you writing a three-page feminist response published in a  
youth magazine. Bolstered, you tried another.

1. You found your niche in analysis and criticisms—2. Books  
created windows that cast light into places you had not  
bothered to reach—

1343 **Wuthering Heights.**

*In procrastination of writing this essay, 2018.*

A book full of twists and turns and winding revenge plots. A messy story.

1. Not unlike yours—2. But a story all the same.

∞

**X.**

The missing factor. The unanswered question. The empty book.

1. What will keep you chasing answers even when there are none to be found—

**You.**

*At a computer: tired eyes, 2018.*

Silly girl. Eccentric girl. Girl made strong by her books, spine straight, held tilted.

An idle evolution. A silent rebellion. A quiet upheaval.

1. Fear the one who walks with words—

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**Z—.**

An end. You have not discovered it alone.